



Illustration by Katie Wilhelm

Bridging Divides

The Wordsfest 2022 Zine



words

THE LITERARY AND CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL

Introduction

Welcome to the Wordsfest Zine, a publication born out of a partnership among Words, Western University, Writing Studies at Western, and Fanshawe College.

Museum London, the location of the festival, offers a gathering place at the forks of Deshkan Zibi, or “Antler River,” a site of regional identity and Indigenous history that symbolizes divergence and convergence. The festival takes place on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton (Neutral) peoples, not far from where some of Upper Canada’s earliest Black refugees arrived after fleeing slavery in the United States. The Huron-Wendat peoples also have a history of living in this territory. In the London area, there were Treaty 6 London Township, Treaty 7 Sombra Township, and Treaty 21 Longwoods.

The river’s forks are a traditional meeting place where tributaries converge, a place to gather and reflect on forces that divide our communities, to listen to the land and water, while forming a future vision that bridges divisions between different ways of knowing and navigating our world.

Our goal this year was to provide writers a space in which to address the themes of meetings, convergences and divergences in all of their urgency and multiplicity. We put out a call for poetry, prose, and artwork that explored these themes and their relationship to the present moment.

We asked writers and artists to lead us down new paths, to bring us together and to chart the forces that hold us apart. The contents of the Zine are often mournful. The reader will encounter loss, death, and various forms of trauma. But there is a thread of hopefulness that runs through every piece in this Zine, no matter how mournful: in the face of everything that is happening, we are still writing and drawing, we are still making art. And it is in this making that we meet and move forward together towards the possibility of a better future.

Acknowledgements

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We are grateful for the many sponsors of Words, notably the Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, and the London Arts Council, who make the festival possible.

Finally, to all of those who submitted their creative works for the Zine: thank you!

The Wordsfest Zine is produced on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Attawandaron (Neutral), and Wendat peoples, and publishes writers from across Turtle Island.

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Tents in the Park

By Daniel E. Lenart

In the City Without a Soul
When misfits and outcasts were kicked out,
Banished to exile, even the ancients historically
Understood this sentence, this cruel decree, to be worse than the death penalty.
Is it any wonder, then, that some chase the dragon
To numb the pain?
Descending into sleepwalking zombies
In the City that Hates Itself,
With this new realization, that a dying that is not yet death,
Where evil goes to multiply,
Is low quality, no life for the living.
Can a faint pulse produce a smile?
But who alone can understand the uprooted aching, lonely heart,
Recently estranged and disconnected from the private tribe,
Becoming slowly alienated,
Ending up as eccentric recluses?
Success at dreaming the vision,
But frustrated by failed expectations,
Having been rejected, now roaming about like urban nomads,
Friendless, no company,
Labeled as psycho junkies on Richmond Row by wealthy pub
And restaurant owners,
Seen as failures in their humiliation,
While a hundred buildings sit empty, boarded up, because stones smash empty
Storefront windows looking out onto poverty strewn streets.
They forgot to forget,
Way back when they were included, part of the club and felt welcomed;
Successful in the end, contented.
In the meantime Labatts Pharmacy turns them to the bottle
In this City Without a Soul
The City that Hates Itself.
These days homesick and yearning,
Nostalgic
Surely, if they lose their identity, their City Hall issued Dog Tags,
They are lost.
Who do these excluded, uninvited homeless belong to, except themselves?
Shuffling along,
You are you.
I am myself.
But who are we?
Are they not othered individuals,
Cut from the winning team, desiring fond affection, acceptance,

They forgot to forget

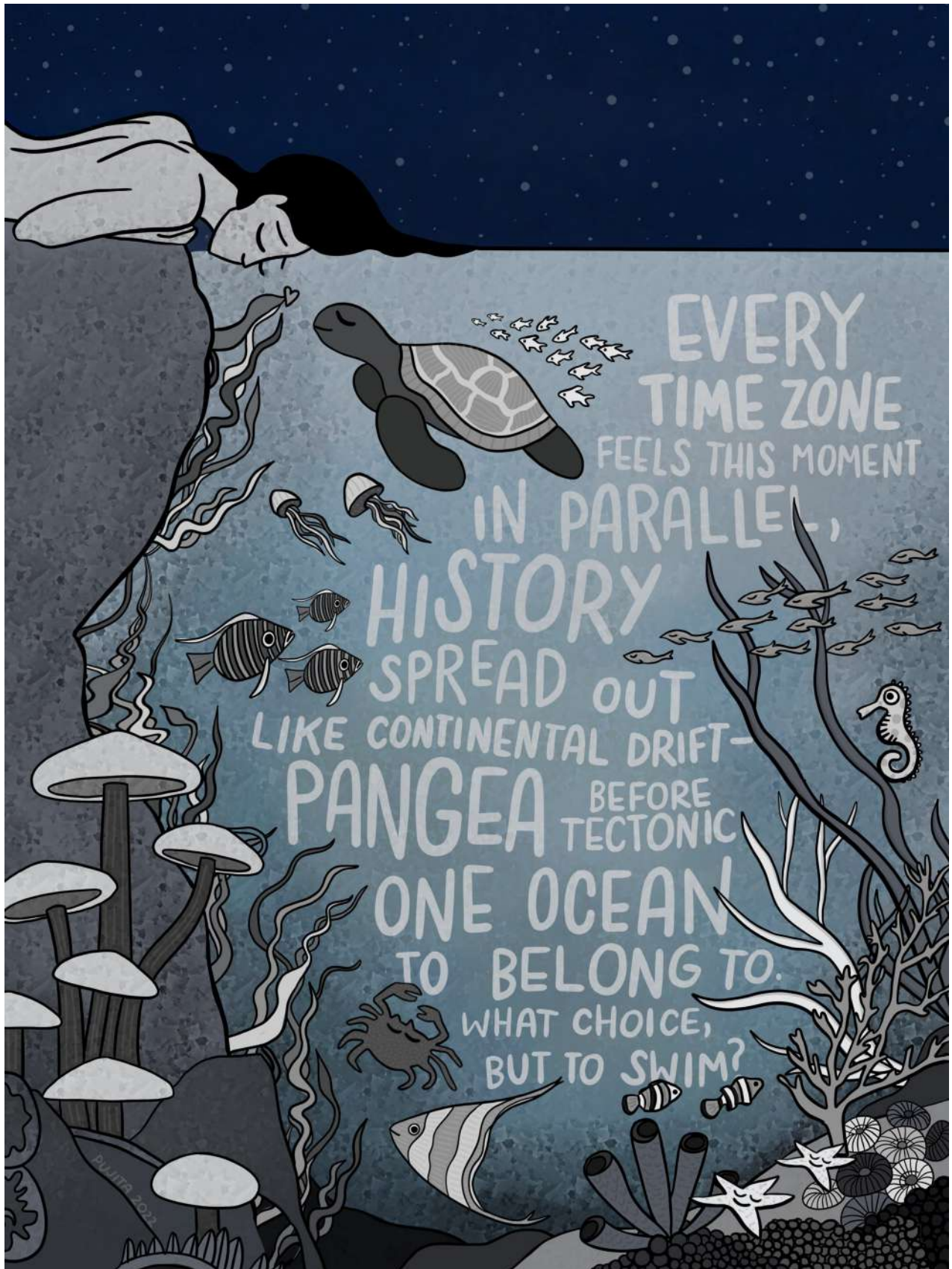
Lacking only love?
Successful and victorious when they think about the time
They will become who they are going to be?
Still, "To Be An Outcast In This World Is An Honour."
And teaching the humiliated to dance,
Pulls them up.
Without sympathy, the aloof look down upon
A fellowship of vagabonds, hoboese, urchins, and beggars.
Those detached others, in high expensive condos, who gaze deeply into mirrors,
Demanding perfect beauty,
Glance down, way, way down at these plain wanderers pronouncing them ugly in
Their disfigurement
Painful sores leave beautiful scars.
That's why those who sleep rough,
Are kept at an arm's length,
Without empathy.
The hard-hearted overlook pleas for mercy without compassion,
In their vanity,
Bullying managers, belligerent City Hall obnoxious bureaucrats
The undeclared nameless and faceless rebuked by the sting
Of wicked tongues,
Whimpering moans of suffering are not well received by deaf ears.
In This City Without a Soul
The City that Hates Itself.
Inside, a party is thrown to congratulate the self-serving adulation seekers.
Outside, no useful help is offered,
To lift the sagging weight,
Weighing heavy upon the stooping knees,
To shift the burdening load.
HELP US.
Shat upon and stung with indifference,
In this way, apathy added in
Handsome losers, and perfect gentlemen
migrate down along the river,
Where running, bubbling sweet water
brings life.
Here, now, they can let out their wild hairy men in the bush,
Like so many uncivilized animals,
Only to make ramshackle hovels, like fantastic architects in the Magic Kingdom in their
happy
Isolation
This Side of Joy.

This City Without a Soul
The City that Hates Itself

No helping prayers offered from the church pews, comfortable saints squatting,
In This City Without a Soul
The City That Hates Itself.
Without a pot to piss in,
Finding themselves in oblivion,
Urgently asking themselves questions of truth,
Becoming defiant mockers in resignation,
Now quickly looking for meaning, in the stories of death from the camps.
Why?
Why me?
But, here, to collect oneself, in this way, in quiet solitude,
Can eventually be healthy.
Even so, this, and these circumstances, are nothing more than the callous
Abandonment by not-so-close family—betrayed
And cultured citizens of a failed society write these thoughts, when the words of the perplexed
Transfixed
Fail.
As civilization crumbles,
The gobsmacked unable to mutter the unspeakable,
"ALL WE NEED IS A ROOF,"
The urban campers whisper.
Will anyone hear, and listen?

But, here, to collect oneself, in this way, in quiet solitude

By Pujita Verma



Blood / Lines

By Isabel Pasila

Before I was born

my body

was my mother's body was

my grandmother's body.

Everywhere I go

I carry their gifts and their grief

with me,

the weight of their flesh

pressed against my skin.

I carry the stories

my mother crafted in candlelight,

when her voice

was loosened by gin,

of her home by a flooding river,

of her father's tenderness,

of the way music moves her closer to the self

her mother was unable

to love.

My body is a tapestry of my father's rage,

and my grandmother's father's,

and my grandfather's father's.

**the weight of their flesh
pressed against my skin**

I know how their anger
sheltered them, I know their terror,
I know what it is like to have my body,
soft and trembling,
flung into cool linoleum
by a man feral
with his own suffering.

I am desperate to see past
the chapped and purple-veined skin of his hands,
the enormity of his violence,
the way I am still startled
by revving engines
and raised voices
and the unprompted laughter, even,
of my friends.

But is this attempt to pass unmoved through my own pain
an act of violence
against the animal of me
that is brave enough to bleed?

I rage against it,
I cherish it,

**the animal of me
that is brave enough to bleed?**

I condemn it.

And in quiet imperfection

I move tenderly

towards everything

that wounds me.

I move tenderly
towards everything
that wounds me

Flight of the Birds

By Isabel Pasila

Sister,

Drink this water

and tell me about the pale trees

we walked through to get here.

Tell me about the slouching fields,

crisping beneath our feet,

and the wild song of the river,

thick with winter.

Tell me about the bodies we left behind

in order to save ourselves.

cup your hands like folded wings

Kneel down by this water now,

and drink

cup your hands like folded wings and drink.

Look how the sky is home

in your hands

and a blessing in your body.

Look at the symphony of wings lifting

like a thousand fleshed petals

from the fading trees.

In Memory of Claudius Cossus

By Jennifer Wenn

The lines from Tacitus are few, but packed with meaning,
colourful detail illuminating a portrait of chaos
bequeathed by Nero's downfall and suicide,
a time the Roman Imperium tottered and tore itself apart.

The year of four emperors, Vitellius, number three,
marching on Rome with his German legions to
briefly grasp the laurel wreath before it slipped away and
momentarily don the purple before it was violently incriminated,
found his triumphal progress unrecognized and unwanted
in the land of the Helvetii.

Swiftly crushing the Swiss forebearers, he descended on Aventicum,
their surrendering capital, executed out of hand the
ostensible revolt leader, and paused to imbibe the unslaked
bloodlust of his legionaries braying for rape, pillage and slaughter.

The town's pleading delegation quailed
under Vitellius' bluster and threats
when came forward Claudius Cossus,
 nervous but undaunted,
 learning his shield,
 eloquence his blade,
 this time his destiny.

**learning his shield,
eloquence his blade,
this time his destiny**

Memories of that extraordinary day now reside
in a few words of an aristocratic Empire annalist,
sole testimony to the flights of oratorical emotion
that soared over the sea of swords, spears and bows
fresh from butchery and quivering for more,
the language of mercy holding fast
against the demons of destruction,
building a bridge of humanity over a chasm of hatred,
bristling host rendered passionately compassionate,
in turn binding Vitellius' twitching hand.

The ruins outside Avenches are peaceful now,
most from the later, centuries-long
Pax Romana of prosperity and subjugation,
some articulate ethereal echoes bouncing
amongst scattered stones, mute witnesses to the
magnificent moment when one solitary soul
stepped up, spoke peace, forestalled an army
and saved a city.

**mute witnesses to the
magnificent moment when one solitary soul
stepped up, spoke peace**

My Grackle

By Jennifer Wenn

Noisy and messy the received wisdom,
Labelled “Common,” deemed
Tuneless and devoid of allure.
But as your flock outmuscles
Flashier and more melodious competition
Behold beauty in the charcoal body
And lustrous midnight-blue head,
Harken to the spiky language.
But in this ebony, clamouring mob,
You were an anachronism,
An individual in a crowd
With your own mark of Cain,
A long white feather bifurcating your tail.
A mutant some would cry
With overtones of sci-fi disdain,
An abnormality, contrary to
Nature’s Grand Design.
To me, something else: an artistic variant
Painted with a different brush,
A kindred spirit on the margins
Fighting to fit in, claim your place.
Each thaw I looked for you,
Proudly recording for FeederWatch your
Distinguished difference,
Until came that inevitable spring,
The returning host now
Monotonously uniform,
No flash of enlivening divergence;
But the collective soul remembers
And I will watch and wait;
May the kinship manifest again.

an artistic variant

painted with a different brush,

a kindred spirit on the margins

What We Chose

By Marsha Lemon

Imagine this: a meteor is streaking towards the earth and disaster is imminent. Thankfully, you and your family are able to escape on a spaceship that is leaving very soon. You have just minutes to pack the things you want to take with you, taking only what you can carry, you have to choose. As you close the door and hurry to the waiting spaceship, you realize this may be the last time you see your home.

This is a terrible scenario to consider. Science fiction? Maybe. But not that far from reality.

It is 1956 in Gyor, Hungary. A cold November wind is blowing as twilight eases into night. Gabby, age 10, carries her suitcase to the waiting car. Instead of clothes, the case contains paintings wrapped in sweaters. She, herself, is wearing two sweaters along with two shirts underneath her coat. She struggles getting into the back seat to sit beside her older sister. Nora is crying because she had to leave behind her favourite stuffed elephant.

Papa finishes loading the rest of the suitcases into the trunk of the car. He slides a small case containing a violin wrapped in a prayer rug beneath their feet. Mama is closing the door to their apartment, having made one last check to see if anything important was left behind.

That night will see them abandoning their car at a farmhouse on the Austria-Hungary border. In the dark, they transferred their suitcases to a cart pulled by two horses. At some point, they are told by the farmer to get out and walk. He points into the darkness and tells them to go. They can hear the clomping of the horses recede as they make their way down a deserted road.

In their flight from Communist Hungary, this is what they took with them: 5 paintings, 3 violins, a cello, an antique prayer rug and a silver casket. These traveled with them to Vienna, Austria and Genoa, Italy. It was here the family made their way to Canada, sponsored by a church group. Now at their final destination, the musical instruments were sold one by one. The silver casket was used in barter for an abortion. The prayer rug was given to a new friend.

And what remained of their life in Hungary? A painting that hangs in Gabby's dining room. It turned out to have no value. But to Gabby, it does.

So this is history, right? Wrong. It is happening every day. At this moment, someone is making those decisions of what to take and what to leave behind. Filling a suitcase or just pockets with pieces of their life. Getting into the back of a truck, walking onto a fishing boat, holding onto the sides of a raft. The names of the countries have changed. Afghanistan, Ukraine, Somalia, Honduras. The list goes on. Life goes on.

I asked Gabby what she would have taken with her if given the choice. She said a Japanese jewelry box given to her by her great-grandmother for her 9th birthday. It was black lacquer with mother-of-pearl inlay. She kept a 10 year old's treasures in it. Seed pods, a beautiful stone, leaves, a lost button. She remembers it still.

She remembers it still.

Thinking back to our spaceship and the meteor hurtling towards earth. What would you take with you? How would you decide? Look down at your hands. What is there?

Look down at your hands. What is there?

The Moth

By Mikayla Koevoets

I made you the light of my life
And you turned me into a moth

You knew how to light up a room,
Brighten my day
I was blinded by you

Now in my darkest hours
I'm still drawn to you
You'll be the death of me

Favourite Colour

By Mikayla Koevoets

I stand by
And wait for you to change
I hold onto your empty promises
Until I am blue in the face

I forgot
Blue is your favourite colour

**I hold onto your empty promises
Until I am blue in the face**

Liberation Day

By Mikayla Koevoets

12 months I've been able to use
To rebuild the pieces of me that were left shattered

52 weeks I've had
Full control over the everyday decisions I make

365 nights that you've
Haunted my dreams, but I was able to remember my worth

8760 hours I've been able to
Focus on living as my authentic self, attracting people who appreciate my light and match
my energy

525600 minutes of validating
That it's okay that it still hurts and that those slow, deep, burns take the longest to heal

those slow, deep, burns take the longest to heal

My Freedom Ends Where Yours Begins

By Jordan E. Thomas

“My freedom ends where yours begins,”
Mused the father to his son,

“So—please stop your complaining and bickering,
Because my freedom will not end until your work is done.”

“Dad,” he said in a voice of mock dread,

“Please explain to me,
What this word freedom means,
And who decides that it shall so be.”

“Well our church, our government, our philosopher kings,

So much to explain,
But if they cannot all agree—
It becomes your mother’s domain.”

“Oh, come on Dad,” said the son,

“I know that’s not true,
Freedom comes in many forms,
That affects the whole world through.

Freedom comes at a cost,
When countries engage in war,
To earn degrees of freedom,
That they’ve never had before.

It comes at different levels,
Individual, nation, Earth,

Religion, and yes, Facebook and Google,
All contribute—for what it’s worth.

Freedom is liberation from slavery,

In all of its many masks,

It could even be a son leaving home,

His parents free at last.

Freedom can be simple,
Like having your own space,
Different freedoms for different people,
Freedom of choice for the whole human race.

Please explain to me,

What this word freedom means

But freedom can't be an illusion,
Or mocked by anarchy,
Shrouded by many secrets,
In our so-called democracies.
So what is freedom?
Who really knows?

But freedom must be a happy thing,
And encompass life's highs and lows.
Neither your freedom nor mine,
Can ever truly come first,
Unless we're all condemned to be free,
Now that would be so much worse."
"Now where did you learn all of this,
My dear intelligent son,

From your esteemed place of learning?"
"Yes, but confirmed by my sweet old mum."

They both laughed.

we're all condemned to be free

Won't Tell

By Deaira McIsaac

Ghost Mommy Zombie Demon even
those words can't describe how she felt
physically.

Looking in her eyes you couldn't even
tell that she felt empty, blank. Bare,
vacant, numb.

To at least feel something she took a
blade, put it on her upper thigh and
from left to right, left to right, left to
right she swept she swept from left to
right.

Looking down at the red severed skin
she takes a breath and when she can
breathe she realizes this blade is her
life support.

You will never see the pink raw
glistening flesh that lays on her skin
as scars.

Because she believes those marks on
her leg will then define her, like your
eyes define your soul, like your shoes
define your social status, like wearing
glasses defines how smart you
are, most importantly it makes her feel
weak.

She never tells you the story of what
brought her to feel like this in order to

To at least feel something

keep control of her pride.

If you don't believe it ever happened,
it can't belittle you.

The slayed body seemed content.

While sitting in class wanting to look
like a ghost, wishing not to feel like a
zombie,

smiling was her cover to make people
think she was okay,

after being soulless for what seemed
like decades, her body started to
deteriorate like a zombie's.

Asking for help doesn't make you
weak, it makes you just as strong as
those who don't.

Unfortunately she was unable to learn
this lesson in time...

**Asking for help doesn't make you
weak, it makes you just as strong as
those who don't**

The Secret

By Nada Faci

The secret, I finally figured out what the secret is
After years of trying to see between people, tilting my head, blurring my vision
It sits neatly now in the palms of my hands
But I was foolish enough to let it fall through the cracks of my sweaty palms
Loving yourself...true love
Loving your feet, face, freckles
Falling for it all
But not a patient kind of love
Not a love where you will love yourself just in hopes that someday somebody will
 come along
Expecting it to fall in front of the road tossing & turning
But holding your own hand at the possibility that nobody else ever will
That is truly being content
Because I imitated my adoration for myself simply because I thought that one day I'd have it,
 one day I'd hold it
Just like holding your breath under water because I knew eventually I would breathe air,
 eventually I'd get it
However, reality is, I might never get to breathe that air, and I might need to learn to get used
 to the water
Even if it is forever

Loving your feet, face, freckles
Falling for it all

Choreographing My Dance

By Marilyn Ashworth

It's been a long, dark, lonely three years reinforcing that I alone must choose my dance partners.

I choose to dance a pas de deux with love, rumba with joy, free dance with family, waltz with peace,
cha-cha with positivity and swing with possibility.

My pen is my sword, and I will fight to write a long-lived, sunny, connected third act.

**pas de deux with love, rumba with joy, free dance
with family, waltz with peace**

Feelings, September 6th, 2022

By Jasmin Omanovic

Almost a month has passed, and every day I was alone and I was terrible.
Lonely. These feelings yell, louder and louder; I feel disgusting.

There is a song I listen to these days: “You are my Sunshine.” It played at our wedding when she walked down the aisle. That’s the song I listen to on stone steps and tears. How many more times will I need to be saved?

“You make me happy,
when skies are grey,
you’ll never know dear,
how much I love you,
please don’t take
my sunshine away.”

Away, far away, where I can’t reach you and maybe you don’t want to be found.
Not by me, not by anyone. Can I not help you, must you take flight while I clasp
your body in my arms, I wait for the vibrations of your wings. Will I let go? Will I
be able?

I wrote you a letter, no, I wrote me a letter. A diary of change, but not everyone
needs a partner, not everyone needs a letter. Not every moon needs starlight.

I make my myths, and I fill them with you. You are the hero and you are the villain
and I need the story. Where do I belong, not from here, not from there.

You are not what others don’t see in you. I don’t see you, I don’t hear you and I
don’t touch you. You are not mine, that was my myth and it has emptied me.

In the pages of my journal, I leave a space, thinking of all the things to say. But
you already know my things, they are the uglies that hang on my shoulders.
You’ve seen them many times, those things hurt you. I feel hurt. Those things
hurt.

Here is the door, M, here it is.
You’ve seen it already, you aren’t inside.
I wasn’t ready to show it to you,
because it scares me.
I check my pocket to feel a vibration.
Some birds send messages.
Some birds come back.

**I wrote you a letter, no, I wrote
me a letter.**

five feet deep

By Laika Berdey

the drive bisects the never-ending crows
bestride country road
too many to count
back into the thick the flock the belong
right into the wrong
try to five 'em out

half a dime of sense
tethered with regret
just an unpacked bag
all that wouldn't let
missed rehearsal missed recording
late to the soundcheck
all the mistakes i have left
all mistakes i haven't yet

under earth is not my home
not only form, not only bone
understand unstatic stone
two blue lips blue tulips grow
(in your palm and paved below)

just enough will to fill the spilling car
namesake the least far
call out where we are
the stars the constellations have aligned
have made up their minds
never call you mine

hairs up on my neck
so responsively
shiver every wave
your neck prophecies
freedom is a leash
so responsibly
tied to fence, took to farm
foaming fickle friendly me

under oath i mottle moans
i'm only ache, lovetaken loans
understated overblown
blue tulips two blue lips show

under earth is not my home
not only form, not only bone
understand unstatic stone

bloom a bed for you to sow
in your palm and paved below

bloom a bed for you to sow

Laura

By Steve Elkerton

Horizons in her eyes
Seascapes in her movement
She flies when flight is threatened
Hugs who loves her free

Horizons in her eyes

The Folded Flag

By Alex Marple

After the shock has left me,
After the pain subsides.
When all I see are memories,
When life and death collide.

What does it take to lay down the guns?
Are they the only weapon of peace?
How many will fall, before we are done?
Will this river of blood ever cease?

Do the memories of death stay with me?
Have I already killed my soul?
Can both sides ever be free?
Has my heart been replaced with a hole?

“I am dying” I whispered to no one,
I have blood from war on my hands.
I feel my truth burn like the sun,
While my blood turns cold on the land.

My parents won't see my body in the bag,
My story may never be told.
They will give my family a folded flag,
To comfort them when they are old.

Someone who is a world away,
Asked for a soldier to die.
Tell my loved ones “in this world I can't stay.”
For me... dry their tears when they cry.

Years from now when I am forgotten,
And enemies somehow make friends.
Remember this process of dying,
Will somewhere awaken again.

**When all I see are memories,
When life and death collide.**

I have come here to speak to you

By Amber Booth

Before I start, I would like to issue a few trigger warnings. My poem deals with heavy themes including sexual assault, physical violence, and murder. Additionally, I will issue a content warning for talk about my time in the military. If anyone would like to excuse themselves before I start please do so.

I have come here to speak to you about my friend. A friend who was taken away, not by accident.

Not by recklessness, or foolishness.

No.

She was taken by a man.

A man with an obsession.

A man who was respected by the community.

A man who we looked up to. A man I had been proud to have on my side.

A man who now sits rotting in jail.

A man whose name you can easily find on the internet, while hers seems to have been forgotten.

... **I will not say his name. Not today.**

He broke into her home and beat her.

She was naked and bound when he raped her—raped her for 2 fucking hours.

Then he took photos of her. She begged for her life, and tried to escape, but that didn't fit his plan. So he covered her mouth and her nose, and he murdered her.

...

I will not say his name. Not today. His name is not important.

But hers is. Today I tell this to you to help remove the anger and the sadness I have in my heart as it has taken up residence for far too long.

To make space for love.

And kindness.

By remembering Marie-France Comeau.

That was her name. She was his last victim. His last obsession.

...

Corporal Comeau was my friend. She was my mentor. She always had the biggest smile and she loved life. She was a courageous and supportive friend. And she loved to travel.

She was the person who made sure that, when I arrived in CFB Trenton, I knew my way around, knew where to get food, and where to get a drink. She showed me how to survive in this new place so I didn't have to struggle like others did before. Then one day she was gone.

Her house was checked and eventually her body found. It was winter then. It was cold.

At first they thought it was her boyfriend, or a family member.

Then one day on the news we heard they'd caught the murderer. They found him from the tire tracks his vehicle left in the snow.

I can remember feeling so angry at this killer, knowing nothing about them.

Then they said his name.

Then they said his name.

We were told who it was, and it made me sick.

Sick to breathe, to wear my uniform, and to be seen in public.

I could no longer trust anyone, because he was a man who was trusted by all. He was someone nobody thought was capable of this.

One day during my lunch break I went to get some food from a restaurant, and strangers everywhere hated me. They hated the uniform I was wearing because it was the same as his.

Nobody cared that it was hers too. That she was my friend, and none of them knew her. All they saw when they looked at me was someone else capable of murder.

They spat on me. They threw stones. I had to apologize for wearing the same piece of cloth as

him. I had to make amends to people for a man who killed my friend when all I wanted to tell them was that she was my friend. And I'm grieving too.

I wasn't allowed to show weakness, or to show I was in pain. So I bottled it up. Pushed it deep down so far that I only allowed myself to think of her 1 day a year. November 11th.

...

Until now.

I share with you here, once more, her name.

Marie-France Comeau.

Help me remember my friend, because it seems the world has forgotten and I'm tired of being alone.

I share with you here, once more, her name.

Marie-France Comeau.

Help me remember my friend

the resilient few

By Sunday Ajak

Did you know that you could save a life with two questions?
I know, crazy, isn't it?
Normally we think saving a life comes with some grand heroic deed.
That's not always the case,
sometimes all we need is a simple question,
or two.
Questions that I want to ask of you.
Where are you?
What are you doing?
I'll spare you the metaphorical preamble,
and make it simple.
Where are you in your life?
Are you where you want to be?
Or are you where someone put you?
I know a lot of people are, myself included.
You know I was always taught that when you grow up,
you gain all this freedom.
You can drive wherever you want,
you can get a job and have your own money,
you can even start a family of your own.
But then I soon realized,
this kind of freedom comes at a cost.
That everything comes at a cost,
even happiness does.
Then I had to ask myself,
Well, what am I doing?
Why did I ever think that this was the only way to live?
That all you can do is go where you're told to go,
be what you're told to be.
It's death.
An active living death.
Doing the same thing in the same way, but
expecting a different outcome is insanity.
A certain kind of crazy we call life.
And in this life, there exists few that challenge this notion.
The resilient few.
The people who inspire, the people who teach, the people who laugh, the people who dream.

Are you where you want to be?
Or are you where someone put
you?

The people like you, like all of you.
The people who accept this life for whatever it may bring,
but just the same will never let it define the way that they live.
And that is what you've seen here tonight.
I hope it has done for you, what it has done for me, for us.
Did you know that you could save a life with two
questions? Well, you do now.

The people like you, like all of you.

• • •

that is what you've seen here tonight.

Sleeping with the enemy

By Tsigereda Getachew Eshete

We grew up with the trauma of our mothers
Our fathers told us “Boys will always be boys”
And we were to hide ourselves as a treasure
And always plan our exit before we enter
We blamed each other for falling victim so easily
We said as a woman you have been taught better
The responsibility is yours and yours alone

After they taught us self-preservation was our utmost goal
They mentioned our role in our perpetual existence
How we were expected to nurture life itself
And build a family with our former "enemies"
And we were supposed to have the prudence
To balance safety and love and yet always be right
We were to trust no man except that one man
And our existence solely depends on that discernment

Are you still baffled with my mixed signals?
How I have learnt to embrace with clenched fists
And love with a suspicious heart
When I tell you, you're the only exception,
I'm also saying I'm afraid
Every time I tell myself you're different
I can hear my father's warning about how all men are the same

I was trained to notice you as threat
And build barricades around myself
I hope you won't be wary of knocking a little bit longer
Until I get used to your voice
Notice it also resembles my brothers'
Wait for me until I heal from my mother's trauma
Forget the memory of lives I never lived
Horror stories I vicariously enacted
Give me a moment to unlearn my flight or fight
And gain confidence in you as my ally

**Give me a moment to unlearn my flight or fight
And gain confidence in you as my ally**

You're essentially asking me to sleep with the enemy
My practiced prudence believes in the gravity of time
In the consistent proof of your presence
Despite my sudden retreats for safety
Allow me to bask in your sincere kindness
And defuse this eminent danger
I have been avoiding my whole life.

**My practiced prudence believes in the gravity of time
In the consistent proof of your presence**

Love Language of the Lonely

By Victoria Johnston

Looking in your eyes
Seeing you so natural
Us sitting nigh
Our faces a forced casual
The presence of this moment
Between you and me
Is short a few components
Due to fear of what could be
The perfect shades together
Make up what passersby can see
Your demeanor like a feather
Gently grazing the being of me
Please don't remember me like this
Admiring and yet amiss

*

I can't say the presence of me is always
But one thing is ultimately sure
You'll forever be the wind in my days
The constant push of something pure

*

Sombreness and sound
Both in feeling and picture
Mind and body cast away
In greys and high-pitched whispers

*

Glass that's tempered yet cracked

Glass that's tempered yet cracked
Fragile and somehow still holding on
The pressure building in
Shattering when the universe gets it wrong

*

Soft and sweet in the same way
In words and in taste and touch
Dripping from your lips you put me at bay
Silencing the void that takes up so much

Unknown to us
Yet known all along
Contrast that holds power
Embedded in the worst of it all

*

Desire that yearns to be held
Firmly and to never be let go
Slipping away as quick as it comes
A memory embedded in soul

*

Don't make me keep doing this
A constant circle you're putting me through
Your bittersweet aura the best kind of bliss
Something my dreams are only able to pursue

*

The togetherness in it all
When we're all present with each other
With the sweet tune of Santigold
The way being paved in dreams

*

A sea of flowers and sun casting above
Like the beam that guides me
Growing and warm in the light of love
Both in spirit and eternal ceremony

*

The pace you stride in
As the world moves fast around you
Slow and steady all in the way you carry
The past mixing with your present self
Embracing instead of hiding

**Slow and steady all in the way you
carry
The past mixing with your present
self**

Sometimes I weep
Into the wind
And it carries my cries far
Into a place that remains as silent
As the words I long to speak out loud

Sometimes I weep
Into the wind

Still

By Ann Ping

My dear,
how does it feel to be light-years apart—
to be so far away,
yet so close to me
as if space confines and divides unite?

Only once in a blue moon do you smile
ever so slightly,
with your crescent eyes and deeply-lined palms
that reach past cosmic dust and colored songs
towards me.

We talk with morse-coded blinks, undetected
amongst the dancing stars and restless satellites.
We send notes back and forth,
notes that dangle and hum,
notes so barely there that a single breath
sends them hurtling away.

So,
I hold mine,
and you hold yours.
And within the vast indifference of space,
we stay still. Because, in this,
we find the 'yet'

**And within the vast indifference of space,
we stay still.**

and we find the 'nevertheless'.
the moon pools by my old oak bed
that rests in a stranger's head as if

Love, Defined

By Roméo Desmarais III

When I asked how he
reconciled his Church's stance
on homosexuality with

the fact that three of
his six children are
gay/lesbian, the perfectly

simple response my
practising-Catholic, late
father unhesitatingly provided

profoundly impacted my
formation and development of
a clear, concise, deeply

rooted, and spiritually
grounded (yet completely
irreligious) knowledge

and understanding,
based on his
model and example,

of my
ultimate standard
in defining

true
unconditional
love:

*"That's easy:
I love my children."*

deeply
rooted, and spiritually
grounded (yet completely
irreligious) knowledge

Under the cotton tree stood the witch

By Reejula Roy

The witch looked up at the cottonwood tree
Taller than her chimney, mightier than her ego.
Its crooked, white branches
Like bolts of thunder, breaching the night sky.
The witch looked down below her,
As far she could see,
As far as the branches could stretch,
Laid crispy, brown quilt of shreds.
The witch came closer, looked up again.
Few bright yellow leaves,
Rattling in midnight breeze,
Glowing in the silver glimmer,
Honouring their last few hours of life.

“This tree is so old!” the witch thought.
So is she.
With a tall spine, bit hunched at the top,
From the burden of all the springs.
With a black robe running down her legs,
She leaves her trail of pride as she walks.
With a hat as dark and sharp as devil’s shadow,
And a cane that reminds of the fading glory,
The witch had lived her life.

She can hear her mirrors talking again,
Whispering of the little ravens
That fly in through the creaks of
The vintage wooden hut,
And walk all over her.
The mirrors are speaking of how
Those footprints on her skin will never fade.
She also heard the mirrors yesterday
Laughing over how her hair looks more
Like the white branches of that cotton tree.
She remembered when they flattered
Her thick brown curls
Laced with green leaves, a few days ago.
“Oh! Those raccoons! How fast do they grow!”
She thought.

the burden of all the
springs

The witch stood on her porch
Staring at her wilted garden.
Gone are the days of blooming mushrooms,
Rare and exotic herbs and orchids
Dancing through the seasons in the sun.
The cauldron that once brewed potions,
Potions that could master the deadly sins,
Now drips through the rusts in rain.
The long rides on the broom,
The places she had seen,
The people she had met,
Oh, such awful things she has done.
Awful, yet so marvellous,
As evil as a wizard can dream.
Those crowds that
Giggled and gleamed as she walked by,
Feared her power, envied her freedom,
Now smirk in disbelief.
“Those raccoons! I’ll kill them all,” she clenched her fist.

**She saw the streaks of rot,
Like the footprints of ravens
on her skin.**

Under the cotton tree stood the witch.
The raccoons fled to the dark in the barn.
She touched the bark,
As white as her hand in the beaming moon.
She saw the streaks of rot,
Like the footprints of ravens on her skin.
She looked up to the branches,
And smiled, because her hair looked like them.
She braced the trunk
as far as her hands could reach.
Beneath the quilt of shreds
The roots of the cottonwood
Met the finger of the witch.
She said to herself,
“I’ll live as long as I don’t fit in my fist.”

Alive and Beyond

By Siddharth Maheshwari

They must be alive
Say howling winds and ion storms
Terraforming oddities,
Glowing in colors I can touch
Is it life that makes worlds beautiful?
Or beauty that makes life?
Moving, twirling, circling
What but breath gives that quality
Water borne of sand
Vegetation from destruction
What if not tenacity of the soul
Can surmount such odds?

Eternal burn to gaseous churn
Drawing cosmic breaths
Of push and pull
Faith, in life after
When empiricism is the diametrical opposite
Decadence in acceleration
We can be saved by spontaneity
And by the apathy of meaning
Like everything outside the micro
We really are just grains of sand
Flitting around on the beach of life

Is it life that makes worlds beautiful?
Or beauty that makes life?

My name is Siddharth

By Siddharth Maheshwari

My name is Siddharth
I carry the sounds of my ancestors
Of culture distinct,
And memory in motion
Bent, not to conquer
But to honor

I am the hope of martyrs
The predecessor of dreams
An infusion of courage
And my aura gleams
Poetry in motion
Future in rearview
I hope they tell you
What I meant for you

Splattered across domains
Held apart by conviction
Together with brutal contain
Biding, watching, waiting
For moments opportune
Where determination brings power
And stoicism demands release

My name is Siddharth
I am more than my designation
But this culture of arbitration,
Fails to understand
Is that my name was defied with inspiration
Imbued with meaning
And honored with history
All before my unknowing screams
Infested the expectations of my family
And burdened with the name of a clan
My internalized shame
Is no excuse for you
The people rise and die
The Land will always remain
The nightmare is expensive
But the memories are free

Eyes dead ahead

Poetry in motion

Future in rearview

I hope they tell you

What I meant for you

Covenant hands on my back
The dragon's teeth have risen
Marching to the songs of freedom
Eons, continents and souls
The spirit always continues

Marching to the songs of freedom

To Mary Prince, But Mostly to White English Students

By Katriana Koch-Cochran

I've been thinking a lot lately about Mary Prince. Mainly the beginning of her story. The part when the little girl that owns her refers to her, affectionately, as her "little nigger." Affectionately. And I can't help but wonder if any of the white people that fill the class can view this interaction positively and see the treatment that she received in that house as some sort of respite. At least she saw some kindness before everything else horrid she had to experience. At least she had a family that loved her. But there is no kindness in ownership. And there is no family either. And that phrase circles in my head over and over again. "Little nigger." I think about it so much that it gets to the point where it's almost funny. Almost. And I think back to when my professor stood in front of the class and spoke on Kendrick Lamar and talked about how someone said he shouldn't play Kendrick because he says the n-word, but Kendrick Lamar is black and it's his right to say that. His Right. And I think about the blonde girl in front of me who nodded solemnly like this statement was the most profound thing she had ever heard. Now that, that was funny. Because it should be obvious. Beyond obvious. But it isn't, is it? Because white people are, and forgive me for saying this, stupid. And the word is just a word, and the experience of Mary Prince or Kendrick Lamar will never be comprehensible to them no matter how hard they try or how many times they listen to *To Pimp A Butterfly* or *DAMN*. A punchline or a song lyric.

I remember when Dylan—whose parents I have met and whose house I have sat in and who I've spent hours upon hours with—took a video of our school's step team performing and posted it on his snapchat story with the caption "niggers amiright?" just because he thought it was funny. Or to my high school U.S. government teacher who side eyed her black students when we self-segregated in the corner and called on one of us whenever she needed an example of a criminal, despite the posters she decorated her room with declaring how race was a non-factor to her judgement and we were all ultimately equal. I find it hard to believe that she genuinely held those sentiments, and I bet she would think that it was nice that that little white girl could love Mary Prince despite their circumstance.

**Because it should be obvious. Beyond obvious. But it
isn't, is it?**

To The Car of Men Who Screamed at Me to “Pop a Tit”

By Nylagh Mullaghan

Are these the men we are proud to stand behind
as leaders of Western
as faces of London
as some of the best
of our community’s men?

That mob of misogyny inquisitively asked, so kindly and thoughtfully for me to “hop in”.
So thoughtlessly dirty their eyes lick my curves
their tongues move suggestively,
they hang out the windows
so pointlessly naughtily.

I see 1 entity instead of many,
here a head,
there some hands,
pumping hips
as they band into one being of 4 wheels and 5 sneers and a car full of man.

People say that these men are overwhelmed with pressures, expenses, decisions, retention
of these girls that they yell at, so we forget
That catcalling has never worked.
To seduce me or her or whoever.
That this yelling is not for the women they drive by
but instead it is for the other guys.

as leaders of Western

So how can I see these men
as leaders of Western
as faces of London
as some of the best
of our community’s men?

as faces of London

as some of the best

of our community’s men?

So disappointingly they appeal to each other at the expense of my comfort
They suck up to each other with no regard for my safety
They show off to each other at the expense of my respect.
They perform for each other despite women’s requests.

Strong

By JoJo Miko

Relationships inevitably contain change and times of separation which we associate culturally with disappointment. Relationships can seem fragile like a bubble and we idolize the past as we fear future isolation. However, even as I feel my sister and I are increasingly apart, I know we'll always be connected. A good relationship is elastic.

1. Me

Far

She's fast in place
Storms ahead
An anchored ship
Taking on water
I'll be here, I say
Masking the tears
As I turn to
Leave

3. Us

Here

It stretches
Hardly seen
Still it glows
Strong as
Ever

2. You

Far

Fast she goes
Footsteps ahead
A ghost presence
Blinking longer and longer
I'll be here, I say
Masking the tears
As she
Fades

Still it glows

Strong as

Ever



Indulgence

By Gareth Boyle

You're too delicious
to put back in the pantry,
to limit myself from eating,
to save you for tomorrow.
I'm far too hungry.
You're a big Tupperware
full of your words that
tickle my ears gently.
Your lips
sponge against mine and
clap together like
your hands.
Your hands
grip my neck,
choking me as I chew you,
swallowing too fast until
you're all gone.
Maybe I should've backed off.
Maybe you'd still be there tomorrow.

**You're too delicious
to put back in the pantry**

Sometimes

By Gray Brogden

Sometimes my head
Floats up to the clouds
In the sky
Dancing with
The sun who shines
On the ocean bright

Sometimes my soul
Sinks down to the bottom
Of the crystal
Blue water
If only to watch
The fish swimming by

Sometimes my heart
Strays with the wind
Carrying leaves
And whispers
Hello darling,
It is time to come home

Sometimes my heart
Strays with the wind

We Should Have Known

By Rebecca St. Pierre

When smiles reappeared,
When fears disappeared,
When hopes unfurled,

We should have known.

When silence reappeared;
When we disappeared.

Our wizened souls whispered
“You, should have known”.

We should have known.

Changing Seasons

By Katherine Ruth Barbour

I drove 18 hours from there to here.
There, sunrise would ripple across the water,
a stone skipping over the sun.
There, I woke up to a river on fire.

Here, I wake to the screams of sirens
from the hospital down the street.
In the fog of morning, I do math—
calculating class schedules and bus stop variables.

There, the bouncer at the pub was named Jason
and he had read all my poetry.
He called me Writer Girl every time I passed him.
It made the heat of the bar just a little bit warmer,
like he knew how words can thaw winter wounds.

Here, I have to trade a kidney
for a double vodka cranberry.
In the line that pours from the entrance
like the tongue of a snake, rattling and venomous,
I make friends with girls whose bare limbs
catch the light of the lampposts
and shine like polished pennies.

There, the hammock held us in its arms,
tucked us into a pocket of sunlight,
rocked us to a song of crickets and crashing waves.
We had burnt skin and biting hangovers,
both of which have faded since being here.
This memory is the only thing I took back with me.
I had to leave the smell of the sea
and the way his hair looked like warm honey
dripping in the 8 a.m. summer sun.

Here, I write poems alone in my bedroom.
Syllables and similes, syntactical soliloquies,
I weigh them on my tongue,
hold them in my palms like a snowflake.
They only exist for a spattering of seconds.
I have to act fast to write them all down
before they melt in the heat of my skin.

the hammock held us in
its arms,
tucked us into a pocket
of sunlight

I like to catch snowflakes when I think of there.
I spill ink on journals when I think of there.
I call my mother to tell her about the book I'm reading,
I listen to Leon Bridges and take afternoon walks,
I make soup from scratch and drink a third cup of coffee.

But the snow is starting to stick here.
Everything is starting to stick here.

I like to catch snowflakes when I think of there.

I spill ink on journals when I think of there.

Tapestry

By Kit Roffey

My hands silk-threaded together,
awkward and tight as first communion
dress. This is when I ask you if

you could pry apart clammy skin

and de-tangle knotted fingers
to make room. Another hand, zip-

shock of. If acceptance will slip-mold
against the asking curve of my rounded

palm. Messy and so close. Space
between the all-telling creases full of
floating cells. Escaping your

skin. We first meet with body heat

and then with ringing voices, weaving
connection. Will you love me? And when?

**My hands silk-threaded together,
awkward and tight as first communion
dress.**

Clear and Loud

By Kit Roffey

i.
Ration-pour out
speech. Inconsistent.
Know that drought
will come in fits

of slurred consonants.
Tongue copper coated.

ii.
I take the bus I take
the train hears the voices

telling me where I'm
going. So firm in
certainty. Conviction.

Eyes closed, motion sick.

iii.
I'm always screaming
at night. Comes out
in a mumble. Pleading

with myself to twitch.
For someone to touch
my arm. Shake me.

iv.
Here is where I will
tap teeth together. Say
something and mean
it. Hold true. I can

grind jaw joints I can
hope for meaning.

Arbitrary, symbolic.

Know that drought
will come in fits

of slurred consonants.

jealousy

By Alexandra Conroy

what she sees
makes her smile recede.
it's me.

green eyes
crash into mine
like a tide.
salt stings
igniting a fire within my aching chest.

my breath
is dragged out from me,
stolen by the stormy sea
of her jealousy.

I don't know what to say,
so I smile anyway.
even when the bitter bite of her words erodes
my hope
of all we had.

I smile for what could be.
us.
not the sea.

green eyes
crash into mine
like a tide

the shadows ~ holding the invisible

By K. Totten

pain is in the shadows
The shadows have names
known only to each other
said in whispers and shrill screams
Deep in the throat
uttered through clenched teeth
Belonging to hollow eyes
of a thousand forgotten lives
Pain discarded
Pain unspoken
i n v i s i b l e
Silent
Under dirty nails yellowed teeth
bleeding skin

So many cuts on limbs

pain is in the shadows
Cold desperate broken
On fire blistered gaunt
Hanging off every limb
In tangled hair and sunken cheeks
holding tears of a hundred oceans

walking dead with souls
one step in front of the other
until they fall crumble
their breath leaves them motionless

Moving in a different way now
Louder louder louder
a deafening roar
a guttural cry
screaming
Breath leaving
slowly a faint
whisper then nothing

pain is in the shadows
the shadows are sisters
fathers
mothers
neighbours
brothers
strangers
children

Their eyes dark empty hollow
with hunger
Hunger for living and care
connection and family
pain lives in the shadows

travels on broken feet
grows in the woods between trees
under tarps
behind a dumpster
close to its gravesite
bottom of the river

pain is the forgotten
forgotten shadows
discarded grey disfigured
shapeless

The shadows have names
The shadows are beautiful
One step away from death
bottomless eyes
dry bones
whole
broken
i n v i s i b l e

a thousand forgotten lives

Pain is a collective huddled
in dark alleys between
buildings face down on a
sidewalk a curved spine in
a stairwell head pulled to
knees in the corner of an
entrance lying on a bench
strewn behind bushes
seeking comfort food water

face down on a
sidewalk a curved spine in
a stairwell head pulled to
knees i



the gift

By K. Totten

she wears sunshine like a
veil her radiance
never hidden

Brilliant
her eyes sparkle
like a lake at sunrise
playful
peaceful
gentle
wise

Heart
a great oak with powerful wings
she is the impossible

Light
captured in an open
vessel sparkling dust rises
dispersed
floating

Wind unbound
strong
soothing
weightless
suspended

Earth
her roots grow
in secret places of time
woven in every leaf
every stem every petal
clever
innocent

Sand pebble seashell
moss bark clay
my heart

she wears sunshine like a veil

Radiance
never hidden

she is all of these

she is the gift

Radiance
never hidden



the scent of violets

By K. Totten

your eyes are bottomless
with a hundred buried stories and
lives lived
pain love
close and also distant
bitter and sweet
conflicted

you left me speechless
beautiful sad deeply affected

to love someone so simply in the first meeting

i want to know more of you
to lay with you on starry nights in silence
breathe in your heart and sweet smile
the scent of violets
taste all that is in your eyes
when my lips touch yours

tiny blankets

By K. Totten

I am love
rolled into a wide sky
you scatter your clouds on me
like tiny blankets
I am the milky way full
of dreams
You are the stardust
hold me close
I am in love

By K. Totten



Disconnected

K. Totten
2018

Heraclitus, Ongoing

Penn Kemp

Books I read are in the process of shaping, shifting
 each time I open them. Not just pages but the content
 won't let me step into the same novel twice. Characters
 talk back and letters dance jigs that won't stand still.
 Nor do I step into the same house twice. When I come
 home, the front hall shifts to accommodate the change
 I bring in my wake from outside realms. And the place
 itself has contentedly settled within my absence.
 I don't step into the same dream twice. Oh, I try to return
 to change the story to divert the flow from disaster. But
 the dream flips a new twist into its narrative leaving me
 to contend with eddies and currents I never suspected.
 I don't step into the same grief twice. Each has its own
 taste, bitter, sweet or bittersweet, its intense specificity.
 marked distinct and marking me. Every sorrow forms
 a trail you know me by, sure signature of some loss.
 I don't step into the same life twice. Whether I step
 into the same death is anyone's guess. So many small ones
 you'd think would prepare me but who knows what
 awaits us over on the other side, en la otra orilla.
 I don't leave my shoes on the bank and wade in.
 I don't recover what is swept away in the current.
 Every poem hovers on the bridge over metaphor.
 I don't step into the river at all.

Every poem hovers on the bridge over metaphor.

Invocation Beyond Building Digital Bridges

Penn Kemp

Invoking “The Decade of Healthy Aging”, we applaud elders who have so much to teach and more to learn as we enter the digital forum for ways to connect with our beloveds across space and time. We can do this, because we so want to be with them by hook or by Zoom, Skype and Facetime. That yearning pulls us to learn what we need to explore this new realm of digital reach. How?

We watch our grandkids approach new modes, prompted by curiosity, unafraid to fail and fail again until gleefully they triumph. We too try and have fun trying, unabashed, if we adopt that attitude of play, and adapt to new ways of reaching out. Minds stretched and limber, we go beyond building digital bridges to engage with the other side of the screen, unknown and tantalizing with possibility. We bridge the gap, we continue to grow, and so by definition young in flexibility, on novel ground, our neighbourhood wider and us wiser. Resources abound, as we expand into creativity, that dance between self and others, beyond age and aging. The necessary tension of creativity is excitement—the pull between solitude and the community, between what we’ve learnt over decades and what we continue to absorb.

We bridge the gap, we continue to grow

Leviathan Meets Behemoth

Penn Kemp

As I meditate my way into sleep, images surface.
A whale eyes an elephant across a great divide.
Their mammoth presence is equally balanced
in each hemisphere across the corpus collosum.
This thin bridge separates the two spheres as if
they were different dimensions now in contact.
Whale swims her blue ocean in the left hemisphere.
Elephant strides out from jungle fronds into sunny
desert of tawny brown. Huge eyes interlock intensely,
sending signals I don't understand, communicating
with one another by sonar vibrations. The sound is
too low for me to interpret though my chest resonates.
As if I'm anxiously eavesdropping at my parents' door
in the uneasy certainty they're discussing my mishaps.
As if leviathan and behemoth are the adults in the room,
comparing notes on young humanity's last misadventure
and its consequences for the future of the planet that such
magnificent, concerned creatures share between them, for now.

**As if leviathan and behemoth are the adults in the
room**

Unwritten:

By Laurie Gibson

Words come in tiny raindrop worlds,
Effervescent dreams unfinished,
Unwritten but ready for the birth of imagination.
Each drop of thought-blood,
Sweat, and tear-magic holds with it
An affinity for the unknown.
You write through the pain of fear,
Seeking the joy you once knew
At every splash of ink,
But maturity brought with it a critic;
It smothers your magic,
Leaving anxiety in its place,
Rewarding your dreams with limits
And forever what ifs,
Where once you were boundless.
Your gift brings with it
Hope and doom,
Love and trepidation,
But the beauty of your creation
Is in the stories you tell
More than the sum of their parts.

Each drop of thought-blood,

**Sweat, and tear-magic holds
with it**

An affinity for the unknown.

DOWNTOWN AND UPTOWN

By Hollie Rosewood

“The only difference between downtown and uptown is therapy and valium.”

- Lady

Gaga 1: Bird's-Eye View

One side is a river full of feathers and trout;
The other eats foie gras just to throw cash about.
One side is for blue, for youth, and for truth;
The other's for red, for greed veiled behind suits.
One side makes musicians and theatres and murals;
The other, politicians, tailored sneakers, intramurals.
One side is of rainbows: trout, oil, and crosswalks;
The other is of monochrome: black-and-white, they talk of.

The troublesome south stains the picture-perfect north
Where lawns with limousines reveal one's worth
Descendants of four-leaf clovers, have mercy—
Your people know not what they have.

A whole world of wonder reserved for the "betters"
The twinkle won't trickle from their sparkly letters
Descendants of four-leaf clovers, have mercy—
Our names won't be set in rhinestones.

- The Flock by the Downtown Dock

2. The Grass is Greener

One side is the salmon who fought for their pay;
The other must flail to not drown in the bay.
One side is for fire, the monuments, the poppies;
The other's for ashes, no honouring of bodies.
One side makes the money to fund all the marts;
The other, “welfare pets” — will they ever have a part?
One side is of monochromes: reds, shades, and greens;
The other is of rainbows: "art" and oil spills to clean.

The picture-perfect north hides the troublesome south
Where a former dentist idles, foam coming out his mouth
Descendants of ravens and crows, have mercy—
He knows well what he has lost.
But! There's a whole world of wonder reserved for the "lessers"
Tight flocks; free concerts; iridescent feathers
Descendants of ravens and crows, take pity—
We clovers know not what we lack.

- The Clover Field Uptown

3. Request to Build a Bridge

Dear neighbours,

The clovers aren't perfect, despite their pots of gold
The crows aren't defects if they stray from the mould
In soul, each is worth it, more alike than two poles—
We need bridges to remember these laws of old.

This business of "other" kills one's will to appreciate
Another. Birds and trefoils who so seldom migrate
Or even try to coexist without strife between states—
Build bridges and turn over a fresh, blank slate.

- Rainbow Bridge Inc. *"Constructing Bridges From Rainbows Free of Cost Since
the Merging of Rain Inc. and Sun Inc. a Super Long Time Ago."*

The crows aren't defects if they stray from the mould

Kurdish

By Zahra Musa

Can't learn our language.
Can't eat our food.
Can't dance our hearts out.
Can't sing until we are out of breath.
Can't have ethnic names.
Can't be Kurdish.

Must comply with Iran.
Must comply with the colonizers.
Must comply with racism.
Must comply with outdated rules.
Must comply with xenophobia.

Kurdish people have always been in
The shadows.
They try to educate, but no one listens.

Her name is Jîna Amini.
Mahsa Amini is the name forced on her.

**Kurdish people have always been in
The shadows.**

By Sohrab mosaheB



Woman, Life, Freedom

By Sohrab mosaheB

Suffocation
Is a five-letter word
Like anger,
That every time in this cavity of nonsense

زبانہ کشید و افروخته شد
و به بلندای فیروزه فام هستی پیوست
افراشته چون پرچمی،
دریده گنبد آسمان را

Which cannot be reached
Which cannot be preached
Which is torn so drastically
It cannot be stitched
Back together

Never
چون تردیدی که راه نیابد
به بایستگی پنج حرفی شکوهی
زن

به بودن
به زیر پا لگد کردن و پیمودن
ارتجاع خشک همرنگی با جماعت را
را «اطاعت» مفهوم متعفن
Which is a five-letter word

Suffocation
Is a five-letter word
Like anger

Life
Is a five-letter word
And also, death
Inscribed in every unconscious that it is possible
و ناگاه ناخودآگاه به این دروغ آگاه می‌شود
که گاه و بی‌گاه رستن، رهایی، پیوستن
آشفته‌ترین موهای افشان در باد را می‌طلبد
در میانه رقصی گردی، هم‌آوا با نوای قیچی بلوچ
آوازی و شعری از خراسان بزرگ هم‌صدا با آن، غریق رنگارنگ لباس‌های آذری
در سوز نوای سرنای بختیاری و قعر فلسفه شادخواری شعر پارسی
All assembles parts of a whole
Which you cannot break
As your predecessor could not
From the time of Alexander of Macedonia
To this day, there is something beyond what you see
Beyond the flesh
Beyond the grief
There is an idea as old as history
که باز می‌آفریند
This blistry
و سرانجام روزی جوانه می‌زند
In Victory
و موهای رهای رقصان روی پستان‌های برهنه نجیبانه‌ترین پوشش‌هاست
Like a mystery
A Crypto
Which is a five-letter word

Life
Is a five-letter word
And also, death

Freedom
Is a five-letter word
As is enmity
که در جانمان رخنه کرده است
گرچه می‌دانیم جهان را
تنها با عشق می‌توان به زیبایی حقیقی آراسته کرد
اما گل‌های زیبایی که در برابر چشمانمان پرپر شد
Suffocates us
Push us into the way of hatred
Of wrath
Which if it is from God
If the fire is infernal
Then it is an eternal
Damnation
But now it is the wrath of a nation
که هیچ را چنان حریصانه زندگی کرده است
باقی نمی‌گذارد «دریغ» که دیگر آبرویی برای واژه
که طره مویی رازی می‌شود
و سرآغازی
و نامی، رمزی می‌شود
و طغیان سالها غمضی
That has been there for longer than your blind eyes could see
And has made this spirit harder
The only thing left
Ardor
Which is a five-letter word

Freedom
Is a five-letter word

By Sohrab mosaheB



Envyng the Squirrels

By Sohrab mosaheB

I am worried
And yet hopeful
Thinking about a place to live
A place to call home
While I am watching news reports
Of a home burning
Of homies dying

I am counting the hours
Reminding myself countless times
That I shouldn't be late
That I may lose this home as well
Or they may refuse to give it to me
Thinking about the home I left behind
The one denied of me from birth

The streetlight goes off
As the sun goes down
The realtor
Made small talk about
Days getting shorter
He didn't tell me that
Nights are also getting darker

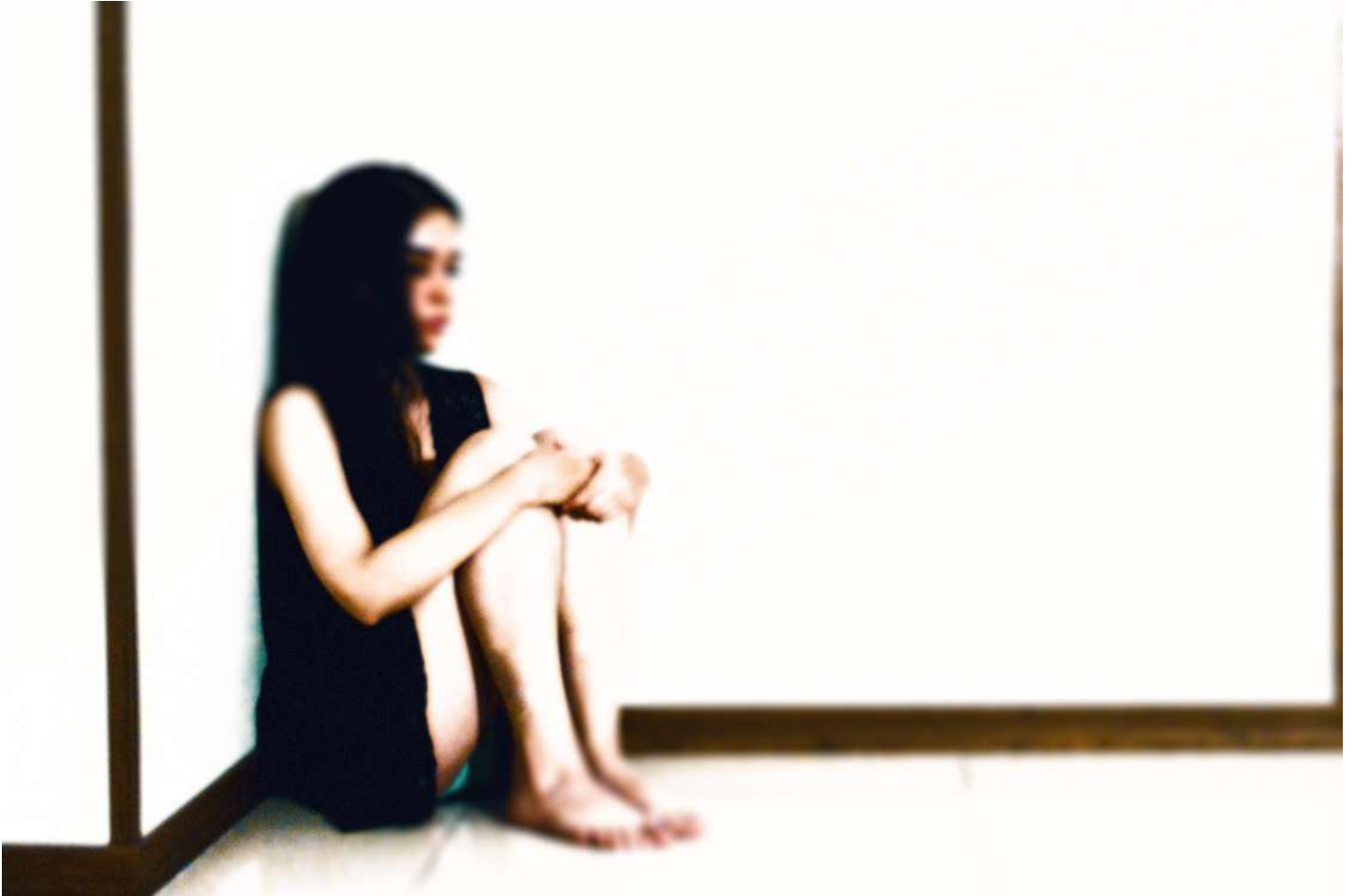
I am worried
And yet hopeful

I think about all the decisions
I must make
Wishing I could make a home inside a tree
Like these squirrels
Playing in front of me
Wishing there was no need for a home
Or a streetlight to keep the nights bright

There is the sound of someone walking
Nearby,
In the dark,
Out of sight,
And I cannot take refuge in trees like squirrels
And I cannot stay hopeful
And I am worried

And I cannot take refuge in trees like squirrels
And I cannot stay hopeful
And I am worried

By Sohrab mosaheB



**“I am worried
And yet hopeful”**

-Sohrab mosaheB

